

## Having a DXA scan

### Other formats

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### What is a DXA scan?

DXA scans measure bone density using a small beam of x-rays and a computer. DXA scans are useful in helping to assess fragile bones and your risk of developing a fracture. They are also used to monitor the effects of treatment for **osteoporosis** (porous bones).

### Why is a DXA scan necessary?

A DXA scan is normally requested if:

- you have a disease that is normally associated with low bone mass or bone loss such as Rheumatoid Arthritis, or a condition which affects the absorption of food such as Crohns or Coeliac disease
- you have been taking steroid tablets for three months or more over a 2 year period
- you have broken a bone after a low impact bump or a fall standing height or less
- you have a history of falls
- you have been assessed with a fracture risk assessment (FRAX) that recommends a DXA Scan

If you are female, you are also advised to have a DXA scan if:

- there is a family history of hip fracture
- you have had a history of periods stopping for more than one year before the age of 45 other than during pregnancy
- you have had a hysterectomy before the age of 45, or an early menopause
- you are underweight

## What does a DXA scan involve?

During your 45 minute appointment, the radiographer will measure your height and weight, and assess your falls and fracture risk with you. The DXA scan itself usually takes about 10 minutes to carry out.

During your scan, you will be asked to lie down on an x-ray table and keep very still whilst an x-ray detector passes over your body. The detector measures the amount of x-rays passing through your bones and sends the information to the computer to calculate the average density of your bones. The procedure is painless and uses a fraction of the x-ray dose of conventional diagnostic x-ray equipment.

## Preparing for your scan

There are no special preparations for your scan. You will be asked to change from your clothes into a hospital gown for the scan as any artefacts will affect the computer calculations and could give a misleading result.

**Please tell the radiographer or assistant practitioner who carries out your scan about any medicines you are taking and about any hip or spine operations, or imaging tests you may have had recently such as a CT scan, barium x-ray or a nuclear medicine scan.**

## Are there any risks?

Because DXA scanners use x-rays, pregnant women are advised not to have a scan. Although the radiation dose used is less than two days background radiation we all receive naturally from our environment, x-rays may affect the development of an unborn child and therefore it is safer not to expose them to any additional risk.

## Where is it done?

The scans will be done in the X-ray/Scans Department 'A' on level 2 at North Devon District Hospital.

**If you have had a hip or spine surgery, please telephone the X-ray/Scans Department (01271 314064) in advance of your appointment.**

## Are there any after-effects from the scan?

No. Once the scan is completed, you will be able to go home as soon as you wish. A report will be sent to your consultant and/or your GP within three weeks of your scan.

## Further information

For further information **about your appointment**, please contact X-ray/Scans Department at North Devon District Hospital on **01271 314064**, 9am – 5pm, Monday – Friday (there is an answerphone).

**About osteoporosis and healthy bones**, please contact Royal Osteoporosis Society **0800 800 0035** / [www.theros.org.uk](http://www.theros.org.uk)

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## **PALS**

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email [rduh.pals@nhs.net](mailto:rduh.pals@nhs.net). You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

## **Have your say**

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